The World Heritage of Scots Roses

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Rosa spinosissima (also known as *R. pimpinellifolia*), the wild Scots Rose, has the widest natural geographical distribution of any rose species, extending from the coastal fringes of western Europe to Siberia. It has also become naturalised in North America and parts of the Southern Hemisphere. Its many vernacular names include 'Scots Rose' or 'Scotch Rose' (because of its association with Scotland), 'Burnet Rose' (because its leaves resemble those of the Burnets *Sanguisorba*) and 'Dune Rose' (because coastal sand-dunes provide one of its main habitats). Most of the common names used in mainland Europe also reflect these concepts and include translations of 'Scots Rose'. 'Scots Rose' is the preferred name in English. The adjective 'Scotch' is not favoured in Scotland – it should only be applied to whisky!

Rosa spinosissima itself was cultivated in British gardens from at least the 16th century and illustrated in the printed 16th and 17th century European Herbals. The flowers of British wild forms are normally white or cream and sweetly scented. Its fruits are such a dark purple that they appear black. The first form of the species with coloured flowers was found and described in Scotland in the 17th century by Sir Robert Sibbald - one of the Founders of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Robert Brown raised the first coloured Scots Roses with 'double' flowers near Perth, Scotland in the late 18th century. However, by 1830, hundreds of single, semi-double and double flowered coloured 'Scotch Roses' had been raised by Robert Brown, Robert Austin of Glasgow, Scotland and other nurserymen. The colours available included white, cream, yellow, pink, red, mauve and purple with combinations in veined, striped, marbled and tinged flowers. Some varieties were bicoloured in the same sense as *Rosa foetida* 'Bicolor' with the front of the petals being one colour and the back of the petals being a different colour.

The first coloured varieties found in the wild included hybrids with other native species (e.g. *Rosa canina*). Other accidental hybrids arose in gardens or nurseries as crosses with *Rosa pendulina*, *Rosa foetida* or other cultivated species that flowered in the spring at the same time as *Rosa spinosissima*. New hybrids were encouraged by planting existing varieties of Scots Rose close to each other and allowing bees to carry out the work of cross-pollination. Most of these old 'varieties' were raised in Scotland and other parts of Britain but some of them were bred in France and other parts of Europe. 'Harison's Yellow' (with the same parentage as several Scots Roses bred in Britain) was raised in New York in the 1820s.

Extensive collections of Scots Roses were assembled by nurserymen, private individuals and botanic gardens in Britain, mainland Europe and to a lesser extent in North America during the period 1815 (when the Napoleonic Wars ended) to about 1840. Plants were further disseminated within the areas local to these establishments and to other gardens around the world. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh played a significant role in sending large collections of these roses to other botanic gardens and individuals in Europe, the Americas and elsewhere during the late 1820s. Although, initially, Scots Roses were limited to the gardens of wealthy landowners, they went out

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of fashion after about 1840 but became favourite 'cottage garden' plants in Britain and Scandinavia where their hardiness and scent was particularly appreciated. A double white form even became associated with celebrations of Midsummer in Finland, in spite of the fact that *Rosa spinosissima* itself is not native to that country.

Scots Roses are easy to propagate from suckers (root-shoots). This propensity enabled pieces of a favourite Scots Rose to be given to friends and neighbours or carried by emigrants from Britain and Europe on long sea voyages to both the northern and southern hemispheres. Scots Roses could survive such journeys (when many other plants could not) - providing an evocative link with their original home. The original centres of settlement of immigrants from Scotland and Scandinavia are indicated by cultivars of Scots Rose growing in the gardens of those communities in North America, New Zealand and elsewhere. Also, 'Harison's Yellow' (effectively an American Scots Rose) was carried across North America from the east coast by settlers in their covered wagons and still marks settlements along the Pioneer Trails.

Most of the 19th century Scots Roses were based on the small-flowered, small-leaved and rather bristly-stemmed form of *Rosa spinosissima* found in the coastal regions of Western Europe. These varieties included what may be considered to be the true Scots Roses (with similar habit and foliage to the native *Rosa spinosissima*) plus complex hybrids such as 'Stanwell Perpetual' that are not. More than a century later, during the 1930s to 1950s, Simon Doorenbos propagated selected forms of *Rosa spinosissima* from the Dutch coastal sand dunes and also created new hybrids. Several of his selections or hybrids such as 'Doorenbos Selection' and 'Ormiston Roy' have a similar character to that of the old Scots Roses.

However, most 20th century breeders used the Asian 'Grandiflora' forms of *Rosa spinosissima* (e.g. 'Altaica') in their attempts to create hardy free-flowering roses. These breeders included Wilhelm Kordes in Germany, Valdemar Petersen in Denmark and several in Canada such as Frank Skinner and Percy Wright. *Rosa spinosissima* 'Grandiflora' is taller-growing with larger flowers and leaves than the Atlantic Region coastal form of Western Europe. As a result, many of the hybrids using 'Grandiflora' as a parent (e.g. 'Frühlingsmorgen', 'Aïcha', 'Suzanne') are beautiful roses but they are not like the old Scots Roses in character. They not only grow into much larger shrubs with larger leaves and flowers but they also often lack the scent that most Scots Roses possess. They should not be referred to as Scots Roses. They are what I call 'Spinosissima Grandiflora Hybrids'.

None of the classification schemes for cultivated roses are satisfactory with regard to Scots Roses. They use the name 'Scotch Roses' or 'Scots Roses' in a misleading way to include roses that have none of the characteristics of the old Scots Roses as they were known in the early 19th century. 'Scotch roses' or 'Scots roses' with a small 'r' is even more confusing because it could refer to any rose growing in, bred in or associated with Scotland in some way! The collective terms 'Spinosissimas' or 'Pimpinellifolias' are often used incorrectly as if they are synonymous with 'Scots Roses', while the word 'Pimpinellifolias' is also applied, even more broadly, to all

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species within the section Pimpinellifoliae (e.g. *R. ecae*, *R. foetida*, *R. hugonis*, *R. primula*, *R. sericea* and *R. xanthina*). Many books and nursery catalogues use the terms 'Spinosissimas' or 'Pimpinellifolias' to include complex hybrids in which the genes from *Rosa spinosissima* have become so diluted that there is little or nothing in the appearance of the roses to indicate the relationship. It is not surprising that many rosarians and ordinary gardeners are confused!

The true Scots Roses and their close relatives are long-lived plants and they have survived in old gardens and by deserted settlements around the world. I have been allowed to collect suckers or cuttings myself from old gardens and deserted habitations; supplementing cultivars propagated from such sources with those supplied by nurseries, botanic gardens and private individuals across the world. My collection of over 300 cultivars has 'National Collection' status in Britain and is probably the largest collection of cultivars anywhere in the world. However, this is a small fraction of the number of varieties that has existed.

I have used my extensive research in living rose collections, printed material in specialist libraries, the archives of botanical gardens and other sources to build up the most complete account of the history of these roses and the people associated with them that has been attempted. I have derived a cultivar list of over 1200 names but many seedlings raised and sold in the 19th century were never named. Many Scots Roses found surviving in cultivation today may have had a name that might be determined through comparison with the descriptions of old varieties but others may have been un-named seedlings. My research has enabled me to assist with the naming of Scots Roses at the Europa-Rosarium in Germany, the Roseraie du Val-de-Marne at l'Haÿ les Roses in France and elsewhere. Such collections include cultivars that have not survived elsewhere but they cannot always be given a definitive original name.

None of the large 19th century collections of Scots Roses have survived intact in Britain or elsewhere but individual cultivars and small collections have survived - dispersed through many gardens across the world. Some have survived in churchyards or cemeteries, having been used to mark the last resting place of someone for whom the rose had a special significance. In some cases, these may actually be the last specimen of the cultivar and have special significance. Such roses have often been given names by the family that has cherished them for generations or the person who has rediscovered them. I consider it far better to use such 'given names' or give such roses a new name than attempt to apply an old published name such as 'Andrewsii' erroneously with insufficient evidence for its accuracy.

The nomenclature of Scots Roses and their related hybrids in cultivation today is confused because nurserymen, gardeners and authors have been too confident to apply one of a small number of well-known published names - unaware of the large number of cultivars and hybrids that have existed in the past. Therefore, names such as 'Andrewsii', 'Mary Queen of Scots' and 'William III' or descriptive names such as 'Double Pink' or 'Double White' have been applied to many different cultivars.

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I have written a number of articles about these roses for rose journals. Web versions of most of these articles, originally published in Britain, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United States may be viewed on my website at www.peterboyd.com/scotsroses.htm . However, I have been writing a book that includes a very large amount of information not previously documented or published in these articles or elsewhere. This work is nearing completion and should be published in 2010 by The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh with The Royal Horticultural Society – if all goes according to plan. Look out for it!

Scots Roses have a romantic heritage. Over the last 200 years, they have been transported to many parts of the world where the virtues of these charming and garden-worthy roses are being rediscovered. The old cultivars should be cherished, propagated and distributed more widely. However, *Rosa spinosissima*, the old Scots Roses and their close relatives also have a role to play in breeding new roses for 21st century gardens. The species and its progeny exhibit resistance to disease, cold and drought. They have great potential in a world undergoing climate change.

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